



Family Liaison Office

Direct Communication Project

Resource No. 18

How to Prepare Your SF-171

Applicants for Federal employment are no longer required to use the SF-171, but there may be some advantages to using it. The advantage the SF-171 has over using a Federal resume is that the SF-171 contains all of the required information. If you are submitting a Federal resume, check carefully to be sure you are not leaving out important information. The advantage of the SF-171 over the OF-612 is that Federal human resource personnel are used to working with the SF-171 so it is easier for them to find the information they need. If you decide to use the SF-171, this paper will help you.

The SF-171 is no longer being printed, but a copy is attached to the back of this paper. It is available on the State Department's Infoguides CD ROM or at the Career Development Resource Center (CDRC). You can also buy an inexpensive computer program of it.

CDRC provides free professional help to Foreign Service family members and to Civil Service employees. One of their services is to review your SF-171 making suggestions for how to improve it. Call 202-663-3042 to schedule an appointment. They are located in Room L321, Columbia Plaza (SA-44).

What is the SF-171?

The SF-171, Application for Federal Employment, is a factual written record of your background and experience. It is used to qualify you for consideration for any government job and for participation in many of the State Department's programs such as merit promotion, upward mobility, career mobility, or executive development. Often it serves as a stepping stone between jobs. It should, therefore, effectively summarize all of your:

- Experience
- Accomplishments
- Education
- Training and development
- Awards
- Outside activities

The SF-171 can provide a great deal of information. This information and how it is presented can make the difference in being evaluated as qualified and, ultimately, being selected or not selected for a position.

The preparation of a good, competitive SF-171 takes considerable thought, time, and effort on your part. Plan its preparation so that the material is organized, the writing is clear and concise, and the appearance is neat and accurate.

Your SF-171 will typically be read by:

- Personnel specialists who determine if you meet the qualifications for a vacancy;

- Review panel members who evaluate your experience and rank you against your competitors; and
- Program managers or selecting officials who interview you during the selection process.

Remember that you will be evaluated on what you write. Your statements will be verified.

Getting Ready

Begin by gathering copies of your position descriptions, performance appraisals, awards and special recognition, personnel actions, letters of recommendation, school transcripts, and training certificates. Have available a dictionary, thesaurus, and the list of action verbs on pages 7, 8, and 9 of this paper.

Carefully read the vacancy announcement or the program announcement for the position for which you are applying. The announcement gives a general description of duties and specifies the type and amount of experience required in order to qualify for the position. It also lists the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) needed to perform the job successfully.

How to Complete the SF-171

First, read the instructions provided at the beginning of the SF-171, prepare your material following the directions given in this paper, and write a rough draft. Edit, revise, and finally type your original, but do not sign it. The unsigned original can be used to make copies when you apply for different vacancy announcements. When making an application for a specific job, you must sign and date each copy of the SF-171.

Do not leave any item blank. Write “NA” (not applicable) in any item that does not apply to you.

Page One - General Information

Here are some hints to help you fill out the first page of the SF-171.

Items 1 and 2: Leave blank on the original. Fill in when you apply for a specific vacancy.

Item 6: Write your last name in CAPITAL letters, followed by your first name, then your middle name. Write “NMI” (no middle initial) after your first name, when appropriate.

Item 10: If you have been employed by the Federal Government as a civilian, provide information on status previously achieved or position currently encumbered.

Item 12: Enter the lowest grade for which you wish to be considered or will accept. For example, if you are a GS-11 and a position is posted at more than one level, GS-9/11, you may indicate that you would like to be considered for the GS-9 grade. By doing so you will automatically be considered for both GS-9 and GS-11. It may be to your advantage to consider a lower grade if it gives you access to a different career field or offers greater promotion opportunities. You will not be considered for grades lower than the one indicated on your SF-171. In applying for a multi-grade level position, only ONE application is required.

Items 14 and 15: Consider a temporary or a part-time appointment. They can be a good way to get started. However, temporary appointments might not offer standard benefits. You should find this out from the agency issuing the announcement.

Item 16: Some positions require travel. It should be indicated on the announcement. You should indicate if you are willing to travel.

Item 22: Do not leave this block blank. Read the instructions at the beginning of the SF-171 to determine if you are entitled to a veteran's preference.

Items 17-21: Enter the appropriate information if you are a veteran.

Do's and Don'ts

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Do | describe your experience so that you emphasize the knowledge and skills required by the vacant position. Use the Action Verb List on pages 7, 8, and 9 to describe what work you actually did. Be specific. |
| Do | describe your achievements in each job. If possible, quantify. (Example: wrote 10 articles on employment for newsletter.) |
| Do | write everything on the SF-171 itself. See below on how to customize the form. Use your own words in filling out the experience blocks. |
| Do | include all experience, whether paid or volunteer. Show actual amount of time spent. |
| Do | arrange your experience in chronological order. Account for all periods of unemployment exceeding 3 months. |
| Do | include and describe major experience in the military or reserves in separate experience blocks in proper order. |
| Do | indicate the number of hours you work per week if you work part-time. |
| Do | estimate and indicate the approximate percentage of time spent in each type of work, if your job contains experience in more than one type of work (for example, personnel and budget). Place the percentages in parentheses at the end of the description of duties. |
| Do | indicate the number of employees you supervised and describe your duties as a supervisor. |
| Don't | exaggerate. |
| Don't | be humble. |
| Don't | describe the work of the organization or the work of others. |
| Don't | use attachments. (Take them to the interview.) |
| Don't | copy your position descriptions. |
| Don't | omit church, community, or club work. |

Page Two - Work Experience

This is the most important part of your SF-171. Read carefully the instructions on how to fill out this section. Neglecting to provide all the information requested may disqualify you or delay your consideration. The way you describe your work experience, salaried or volunteer, can make a difference in whether you are rated as being qualified to fill the position. It will also have a significant impact on how you are evaluated in competition with other applicants.

Item 23: Be sure to respond to this question about whether your current employer may be contacted. While a negative response will not affect your rating, a “Yes” answer will allow an interested employer to get additional information about your current job, which could be to your benefit.

Item 24: Begin with your most recent or present job in block A and work backwards. When writing about your work experience, you are not restricted to the space provided on the form. You may use the expanded SF-171 format or a plain sheet of paper. Mark it as a continuation of block [letter]____. Make sure that your name and social security number appear on every continuation sheet.

See the list of Do’s and Don’ts on the previous page to help you complete the work experience section.

Describing Your Experience

Using the guidelines above, describe your environment, your title, to whom you report, and your duties and responsibilities in each job you have had. Describe specialties and special assignments, your authority and responsibility, your relationship to others, your

accomplishments, and any other factors which help to describe the job.

Hints on Presenting Your Experience

- Determine how your experience compares with position requirements.
- Use simple direct sentences in your own words.
- Use the Action Verb List on pages 7, 8, and 9 to help you describe the work you actually did.
- Edit and rewrite until you are satisfied.
- Don’t abbreviate unless you have already spelled out the term and want to refer to it. For example, Foreign Service Institute (FSI).
- Use “I” sparingly.
- Mention job-related awards.
- Show your salary at the annual rate.
- Customize your SF-171. To create your own expanded form, cut out the heading of block A, paste it at the top of a sheet of blank paper, draw vertical lines on each side to enlarge the experience block so its length corresponds to the length of your narrative.

Definitions that may help you in describing your job:

Duty. Activity which is expected of you in the day-to-day performance of your responsibilities. Be specific. Don’t copy words from your job description. For example, you type, you file, you write correspondence, etc.

Responsibility. Area of work in which you have the authority and the opportunity to be in charge and which requires independent thought, action, and judgment. You may have responsibilities even though you report to someone else. For example, you are responsible for making travel arrangements for your supervisor.

Accomplishment. Activity which contributes something out of the ordinary to the goals of the department, bureau, or office. Whether an accomplishment was done independently or as part of a team, use verbs which describe your exact role. Try to emphasize this area over the others. For example, you de-signed a new filing system that saved time and is more efficient for the office.

Skill. Ability or physical competence which you demonstrate in discharging your responsibilities, performing your duties, or making your contributions. For example, you have skill in typing or running a projector.

Knowledge. Mastering subject matter area. For example, you have knowledge of office management or of accounting.

Ability.
Potential to use a knowledge or skill when needed. For example, you have the ability to produce reports in final form or to implement new office procedures.

Page Three - Education and Awards

Page three of the SF-171 starts with a statement on top of the page that reads, "ATTACH ANY ADDITIONAL SHEETS OR FORMS HERE."

Any attachments or enclosures that are not a part of the SF-171 should go here, between the second and the third page.

Education

Items 28-30: Education should be described as carefully as experience. Include the name of schools, location, dates attended, subjects studied, and number of credit hours you have accumulated toward a degree if you have not yet graduated. A college year represents 30 semester or 45 quarter hours. Most schools require 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours for graduation. You may use these figures in your computation.

Education received in a foreign country may be accepted, provided your course work has been evaluated by an organization recognized by the U.S. Office of Education or the Council on Post Secondary Accreditation. A certification of courses accepted for advanced credit by an accredited U.S. college or university is also acceptable. If you have these certificates at the time you prepare your SF-171, they should be attached. You will be asked to furnish them before your application can be considered complete.

Item 31: Indicate any training you have received from the Office of Personnel Management, the Foreign Service Institute, business or trade schools, military training, or career specialty training. Do not neglect the area of personal development and study.

Special Skills, Accomplishments, and Awards

Items 32: List all awards, fellowships, scholarships, quality increases, and letters of commendation you have received, including the date of each award. Also include:

- Any special skill or material you have written;
- Word processing or computer skills; computer software packages used;
- Membership in professional or scientific associations.

Item 33: Your typing and shorthand speed.

Item 34: List any job-related certificate or license you may have. For example, Certified Public Accountant, pilot, nurse, real estate agent, drivers license, if applicable.

Item 35: Indicate your level of proficiency in foreign languages. Candidates for positions requiring conversational ability in a language other than English may be interviewed mainly in that language. This is your opportunity to shine and demonstrate your skill.

References

Item 36: List people who know you well and have definite knowledge of your qualifications and fitness for the position for which you are applying. Contact your references in advance and keep them informed of your activities. Don't list people who are out of the country unless you cannot provide other references. Include telephone numbers when possible.

Page Four - Background Information

Items 47-44: Answer all questions truthfully. Do not leave any blanks. If you need to expand some of your answers, use item 45. Note that U.S. citizenship is required for almost all Civil Service positions.

Final Notes

Items 48 and 49: Do not sign or date your original SF-171. As you apply for jobs relevant to your experience, make a clean copy of your original, fill in items 1 and 2, then sign and date your application.

Your SF-171 is a living document. As you change jobs, receive more training, and assume new responsibilities, incorporate this information into your SF-171.

If necessary, revise your original to fit the job in which you are interested.

It is import to remember that a false answer to any question in your SF-171 may be grounds for not employing you or for dismissing you after you begin work, and may be punishable.

Supplemental Statement

A supplemental qualifications statement may be requested in the job announcement. You should address each factor and explain in detail your experience (paid or unpaid), education, or special training relating to the qualifications listed in the announcement. Your name, social security number, and the job title you are applying for should appear on each page. Because the qualifications of each job may be different, a generic supplemental statement should not be used.

Action Verb List

abstracted	attracted	communicated	dealt
accelerated	audited	compared	debited
accepted	augmented	competed	debugged
accompanied	authorized	compiled	decentralized
accomplished	avoided	completed	decided
achieved	awarded	composed	decorated
acquainted		computed	declared
acquired	balanced	conceived	decreased
acted	bargained	conceptualized	dedicated
adapted	bought	concluded	deduced
added	briefed	conducted	deemed
addressed	broadcast	confirmed	defeated
adjudicated	brought	considered	defended
adjusted	budgeted	consolidated	defined
administered	built	constructed	delegated
advanced		consulted	delineated
advised	calculated	contacted	delivered
advocated	called	contained	delved
affected	canceled	continued	demanded
aired	canvassed	contracted	demonstrated
allocated	cataloged	contributed	described
allotted	caused	controlled	designated
allowed	celebrated	convened	designed
analyzed	centralized	converted	detailed
answered	certified	conveyed	determined
anticipated	chaired	convinced	developed
appeared	championed	cooperated	devised
applied	changed	coordinated	diagnosed
appointed	checked	corrected	directed
appraised	chose	correlated	disbursed
approved	clarified	corroborated	disciplined
arbitrated	classified	counseled	discharged
arranged	closed	counted	discovered
asked	coded	covered	discussed
assembled	collaborated	crafted	dispersed
assessed	collated	created	displayed
assigned	collected	credited	disseminated
assisted	combined	critiqued	distributed
assumed	commemorated	crusaded	divided
assured	commended	curbed	documented
attained	commissioned	cut	doubled
attended	committed		drafted

drew	faced	identified	led
earned	facilitated	illustrated	let
edited	fashioned	implemented	levied
educated	featured	improved	licensed
effected	filed	improvised	linked
elevated	filled	incorporated	listed
eliminated	filmed	increased	listened
employed	financed	indexed	lobbied
empowered	finished	indicated	located
enabled	fixed	influenced	logged
enacted	focused	informed	
encompassed	forced	initiated	made
encouraged	forecast	insisted	maintained
endeavored	forged	inspected	managed
endorsed	formed	inspired	mandated
enforced	formulated	installed	manipulated
engaged	fostered	instructed	manufactured
engineered	fought	insured	mapped
enlarged	found	integrated	marketed
enlisted	founded	intensified	mastered
enlivened	freelanced	interacted	matched
ensured	functioned	interpreted	measured
entered	funded	interviewed	mediated
equipped	fulfilled	instituted	mentioned
established	furnished	introduced	met
estimated	furthered	invented	mobilized
evaluated		inventoried	modeled
examined	garnered	invested	moderated
exceeded	gathered	investigated	modified
excelled	gave	invited	molded
executed	generated	involved	monitored
exercised	ghostwrote	issued	motivated
exhibited	governed		moved
expanded	graded	joined	
expedited	graduated	judged	named
experienced	granted	justified	negotiated
experimented	guaranteed		nominated
explained	guided	kept	
explored	handled	knew	observed
expressed	headed	launched	obtained
extended	helped	learned	offered
extracted	hired	leased	officiated
	hosted	lectured	opened
			operated

ordered	published	restructured	supported
organized	purchased	revamped	surpassed
originated	pursued	reversed	surveyed
outlined	put	reviewed	symbolized
overcame		revised	synthesized
oversaw	qualified	revitalized	systematized
		rewrote	
packaged	raised	risked	tabulated
paid	ranked		tackled
participated	rated	salvaged	tailored
passed	reacted	saved	tapped
perceived	reasoned	scheduled	targeted
perfected	recast	screened	taught
performed	received	sealed	tested
persevered	recognized	secured	testified
persuaded	recommended	selected	terminated
phased in	reconciled	served	toured
phased out	recorded	serviced	traced
piloted	recruited	set	trained
pioneered	redesigned	settled	transferred
placed	reduced	shaped	translated
planned	reevaluated	signed	transported
polled	referred	simplified	traveled
portrayed	refined	sold	treated
practiced	reflected	solicited	tried
prepared	regulated	solved	triggered
presented	rejected	sorted	tripled
presided	related	sought	turned
prevented	released	specified	tutored
priced	removed	spoke	
printed	renegotiated	staffed	unified
prioritized	reorganized	staged	updated
processed	replaced	started	upgraded
procured	replied	stimulated	used
produced	reported	strengthened	
programmed	represented	structured	validated
prohibited	reproduced	studied	verified
projected	requested	styled	visited
promoted	required	submitted	volunteered
prompted	requisitioned	substituted	
prosecuted	researched	succeeded	went
proposed	resolved	suggested	won
protected	responded	summarized	worked
provided	restored	supervised	wrote
publicized	restricted	supplied	

Checklist for Your Completed SF-171 Package

The final and perhaps most important step in preparing your SF-171 is to review your finished product - both form and content. The following checklist will help you be sure you have not forgotten anything. Check off each item after it has been thoroughly reviewed.

- _____ Typed neatly and accurately. No stray marks or smudges.
- _____ Clear, clean photocopies easily read.
- _____ Proofread for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.
- _____ All items filled in completely and accurately. No blank items.
- _____ Written clearly and concisely, using simple, straight-forward sentences.
- _____ Active verbs and proper tenses used.
- _____ Acronyms explained and put in parentheses.
- _____ Jargon, generalizations, flowery adjectives, and superlatives avoided.
- _____ Qualifications highlighted. Wording carefully chosen.
- _____ Qualifications related directly to specific job evaluation factors.
- _____ White space between paragraphs used effectively.
- _____ Experience blocks arranged in reverse chronological order.
- _____ Pages arranged in logical, sequential order.
- _____ Attachments consolidated without interrupting the flow.
- _____ Attachments properly headed and cross-referenced.
- _____ Original SF-171 left unsigned.
- _____ Copies to be submitted signed and dated.
- _____ Performance evaluation attached (if to be submitted).
- _____ Copies submitted before closing date (if to be submitted).
- _____ Entire application carefully reviewed for flow, content, and form.